Chips

FROM THE WORKSHOP OF

GUSTAVE STICKLEY

SYRACUSE, N.Y

U.S.A

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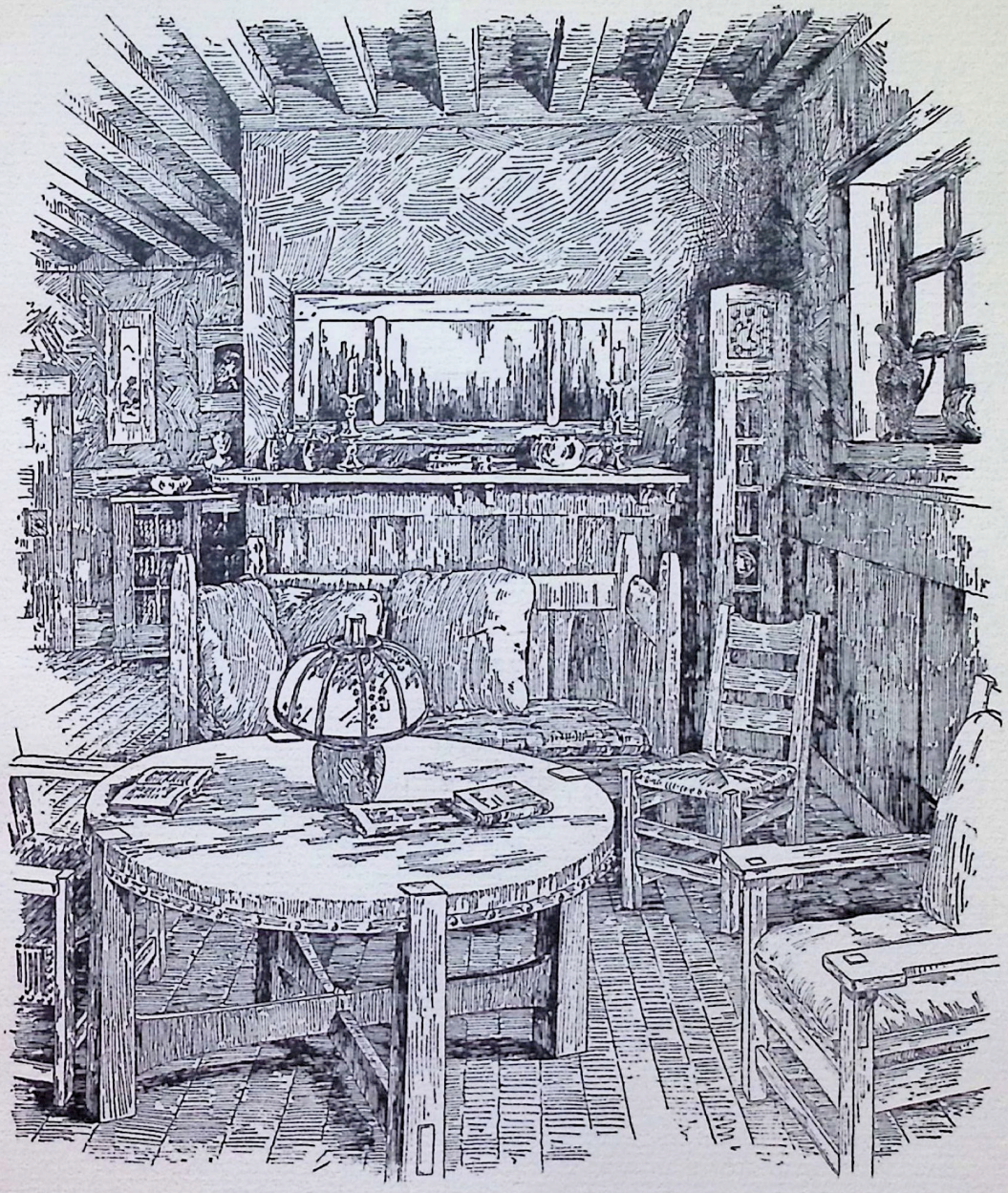
Gustave Stickley

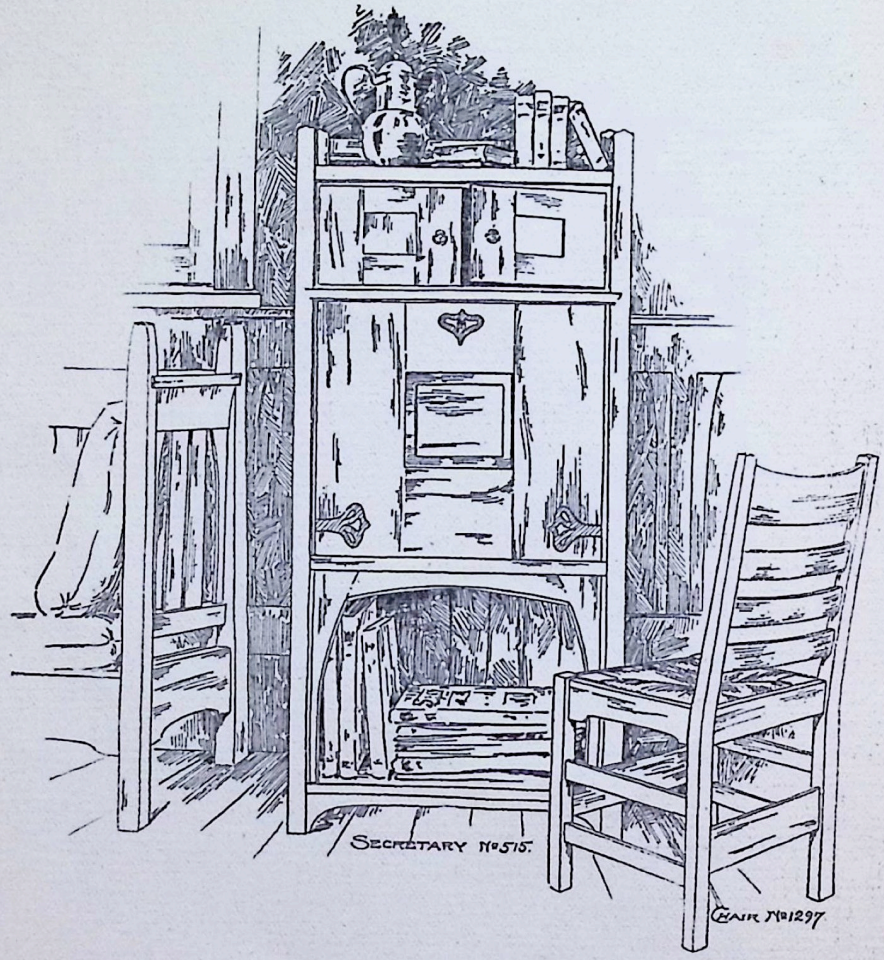
2018.20.01

A Revival
of
Old Arts and Crafts
applied to Wood and Leather.

"Beauty does not imply elaboration or ornament. On the contrary, simplicity and character and the dignity which comes of them, are demanded in the interests alike of practicality and of art."

Our object is to substitute the luxury of taste for the luxury of costliness.



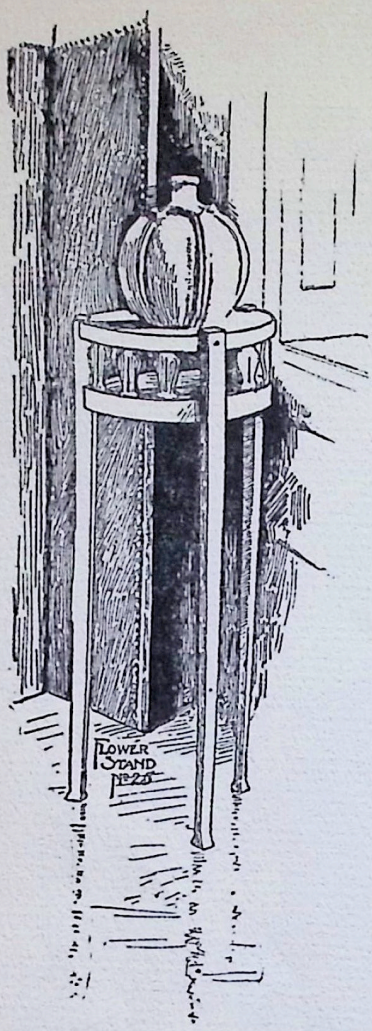

SECRETARY No 515.
CHAIR No 1297

"Art, speaking broadly, may be defined as a creative operation of the intelligence; the making of something either with a view to utility or pleasure." This definition is given in one of the many elementary treatises of the day, which are designed to popularize knowledge. Accepting the definition and advancing a step farther, we may claim that artistic creations often attain a double end. They are useful and, at the same time, they afford keen sensuous pleasure. They minister to our physical needs and they deal with questions of harmony of line and color.

Carlyle, in his "Sartor Resartus," makes the statement that "Ornament is the first spiritual need of the barbarous man." And, indeed, we find the savage decorating with great care and no little skill his few household goods, his weapons and his clothing. If now this savage belongs to one of the superior races, he manifests his embryonic capabilities in the relations between the constructive and the decorative features of the object which he creates; in the sweep of his lines; in his use of dyes and stains. Thus we find the most ancient sun-dried pottery of the Greeks to be modeled upon the subtlest curves. We find the early inhabitants of Central and Northern Europe showing in their ornament the germs which slowly developed into the splendid art of the Middle Ages.

If it is so proven that the intellectual capacity of the races, even in semi-civilization, is clearly discernible in their ornament, it is no less true that the character of each age, or period, is expressed in the objects of use and luxury then created.

A cogent example of this fact lies in the productions of the medi-



eval crafts. With these objects before our eyes, we realize the meaning of an art developed by the people, for the people, as a reciprocal joy for the maker and the user.

And here it would be possible to go a step farther and declare that men can not be civilized and bound together in brotherhood, unless they are given a share in art, which is no mere accident, but rather an essential and a positive necessity of life.

If we advance still another step, we can state with emphasis that one office of art is to give people pleasure in the things that they must perforce *use;* that a second office is to give people pleasure in the things that they must perforce *make.*

What has been named the Century ot Commerce has now given place to what, in the opinion of hopeful prophets, will be the Century of Education. And those now in the forceful and productive period of life should seek out their duty, and having found it, should take up its burden with steadfast purpose. First of all, it should be recognized that, as has been well said by a great modern artist-artisan, luxury is the foe of art. This is the first and most stable principle among those which should be taught to the coming generation. And the second, in the form of a commandment from the same source of wisdom, is like unto it:

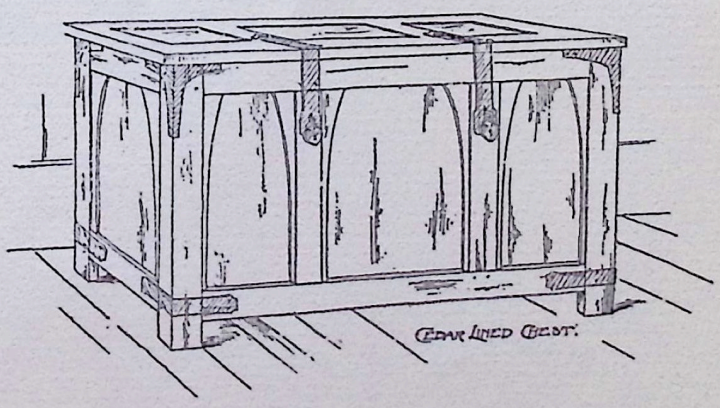
"Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be ornamental."

In common with all other governing principles, these just named are to be accepted in spirit, rather than in letter. Luxury is a relative term. The superfluity of one man is the necessity of his neighbor. The person whose relations are few and whose life is restricted, does not require the complex environment of one whom

political, social, or financial standing places within the constant view of the world at large. Again, luxury and richness are not synonyms. Luxury is the tempter of the idle. Richness in an object created by the artist, or art-artisan, is oftenest the product of the perfect union and co-operation of the brain, the hand, and the pleasure of the creator; as we may find by examining the household furniture and utensils handed down to us from the Middle Ages. In these, whether destined for the king, or the yeoman, we see the same honesty of material, the same thoroughness of construction, the same skill in decoration, the same delicacy, care and inventive quality. Therefore, we view with equal delight the king's throne, the chorister's stall, the yeoman's chimney-seat, and the peasant's bed, or marriage-chest. This is because they are all products of an art developed by the people, for the people, as a reciprocal joy for the maker and the user.

In order, then, to bring on an age of artistic activity, of widely-diffused artistic knowledge, which shall be similar in character to the Middle Ages, the maker and user must understand and value each other. The maker must bend his energies to produce objects uniting in themselves the qualities of utility, of adaptability to place, of comfort, and of artistic effect. The user must choose with discretion the objects which shall create his home; carefully providing that they express his station in life and his own individuality; furthermore, that they respond to his every-day needs.

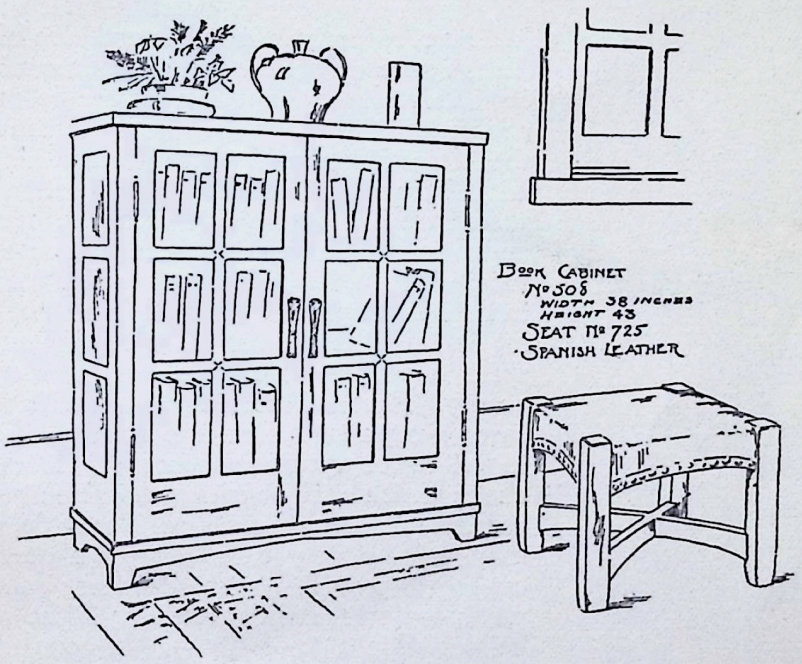
Let us imagine a member of our great middle class, an individual neither hampered by poverty, nor oppressed by riches, choosing for himself an environment reminiscent of the French Court of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He



desires magnificence at all hazards. He purchases it at the expense of comfort, utility, and good taste. He forgets that the "periwig, powder and patch epoch" has passed away. He can not animate the picture whose background he has prepared with so much pains. Neither he, his wife, nor his children spend lives of idleness. They do not wear gowns and coats harmonizing with the delicate satins and brocades of his chairs and sofas; nor is their intercourse with their friends and acquaintances of that formal order which is shadowed forth in the stately minuet. All things have become new: the country, the demands of the century, society, domestic architecture and domestic economy. It is not too much to say that "fine and French" objects of household equipment, or adornment, should be relegated to museums and the stage, where they pass into the category of historic art; that for the uses of daily life they are unpractical, except in the town-palaces, the villas and the chateaux of our commercial and industrial millionaires, where all conditions tend to cast the pall of oblivion over the time "when Adam delved and Eve span."

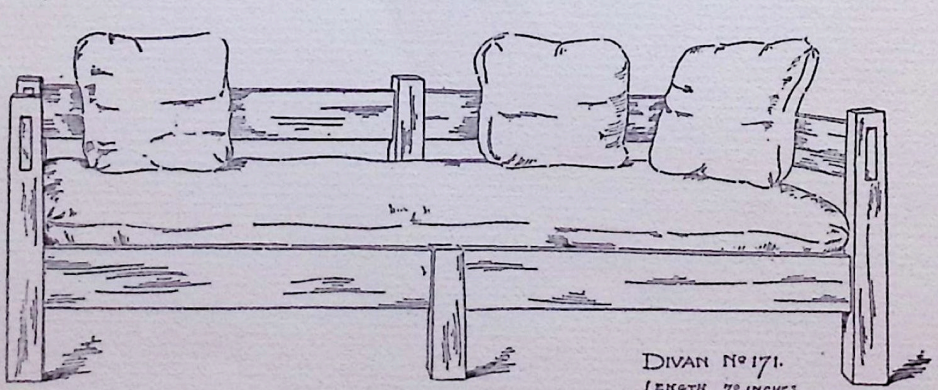
Therefore, the French styles, splendid and exquisite though they be, are practically ruled out by the dictates of both judgment and taste from the environment of the middle class individual.

Now if it be true, as it has been asserted, that no designer, however original he may be, can sit down to-day and draw the form of an ordinary piece of furniture, or vessel, or the ornament of a cloth, that will be other than a development, or a degradation of forms used hundreds of years ago, where shall the middle class individual seek the objects that shall best express his station in life and his own individuality, and best respond to his daily needs? The an-

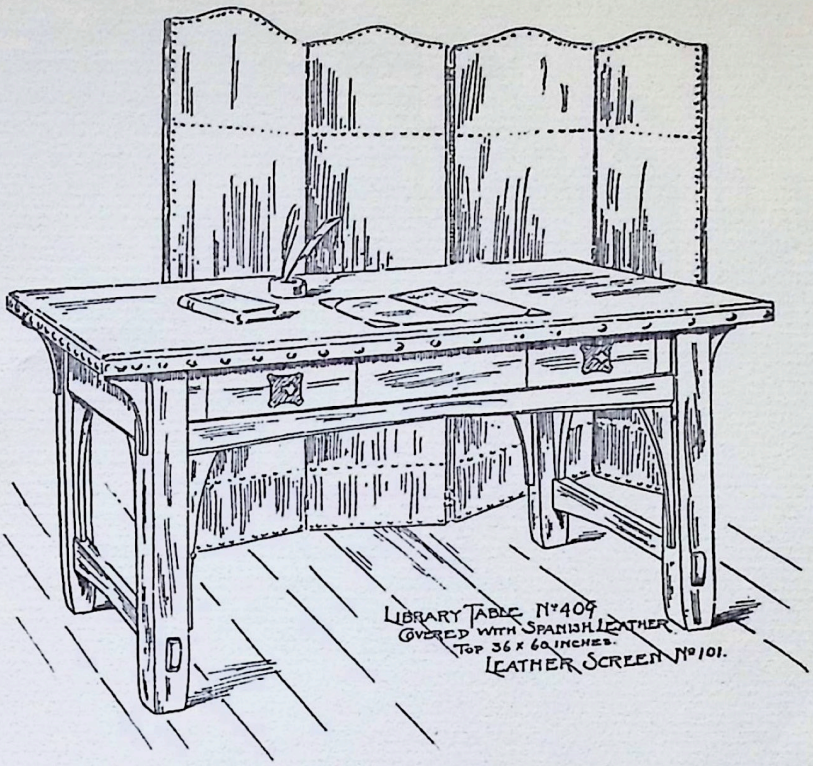

Book Cabinet
No 506
Width 38 inches
Height 43
Seat No 725
Spanish Leather

swer comes quickly. He must seek them among his social and political forbears; among the belongings of the burghers and the yeomen who prepared the way for the democracy of modern times. In the extant examples of the household art of mediaeval Germany and the Tyrol, of France and Flanders, of the England of the Puritan, he will find the qualities which are adapted to his uses. Good design, sound construction, sobriety, and subserviency of ornament. He has but to create the demand for objects possessing these qualities; since designers and makers well-instructed in their art and craft, stand ready to produce a new household art which shall justify its name.

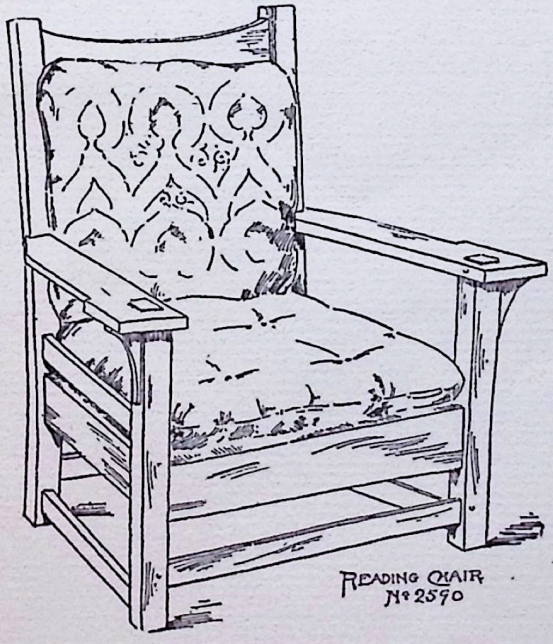
A question which rises just here, regards the number and use of the fittings necessary to the daily life of the middle class individual with whom we are so much concerned. First of all, we will consider the necessities of his living-room. They have been enumerated by the poet-artisan whom we have several times before quoted, and whose ennobling influence in household furnishings and decorations is acknowledged in both hemispheres. His list is a short one, for he inveighs against the crowding of the space necessary to convenience, health and beauty. First and most important is the book-case; next, a table, firm and steady, adapted to writing, or working purposes; then, several chairs which shall be easily movable; and a comfortable couch, bench, seat, or settle, as it may be variously called; lastly, a desk, or cupboard provided with drawers; and a plant, or flower stand, especially if the room be located in a town-house. In concluding, the authority makes a comment which should be considered by those who wish to live without friction, and earnestly to pursue their profession, or calling. The comment is this:



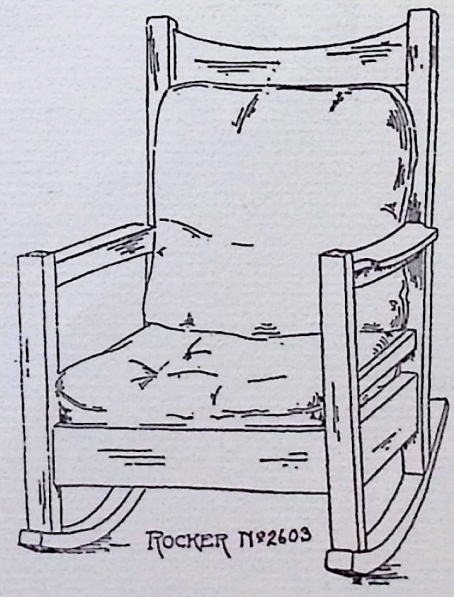
DIVAN No 171.
LENGTH 72 INCHES



LIBRARY TABLE Nº 409
COVERED WITH SPANISH LEATHER
TOP 36 x 60 INCHES.
LEATHER SCREEN Nº 101.



READING CHAIR
Nº 2590



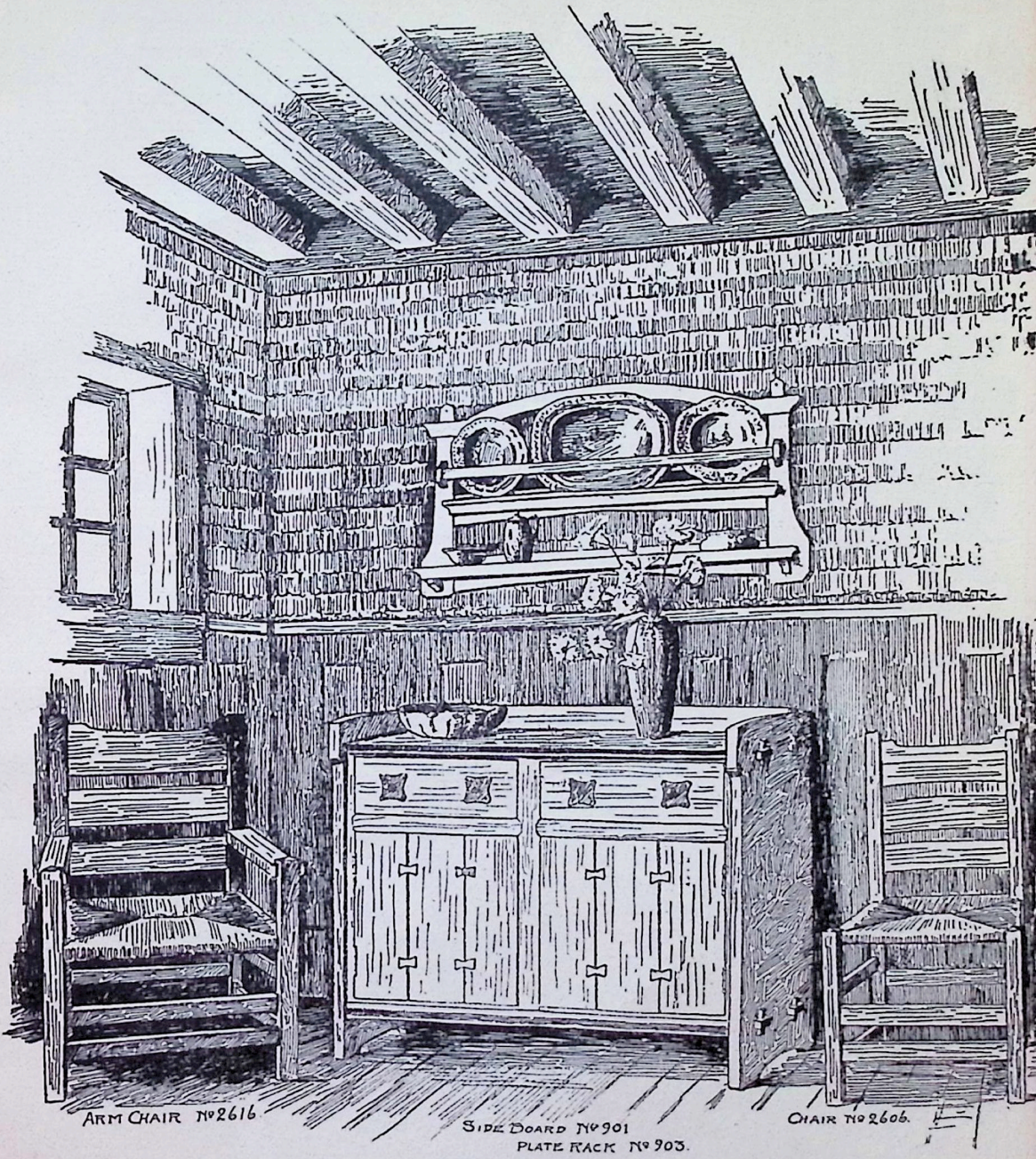
ROCKER Nº 2603

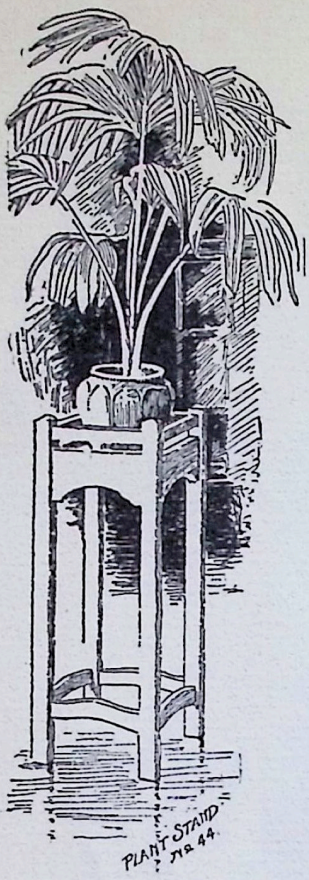
that we can add very little to these necessities, without troubling ourselves and hindering our work, our thought, and our rest. It may also be added that as richness does not entail luxury,—that foe of art and fore-runner of degeneracy,—so simplicity does not necessitate cheapness, and that these objects should include none that have degraded a man to make, or to sell.

To find that this simplicity may be costly, without losing anything of its chasteness, we have but to recall the furnishings of certain rooms in the Tiffany house, 72nd Street, New York, which have become widely known through recent illustrations in American art periodicals.

To find the same characteristics of beauty, elegance and effectiveness, we need only to reconstruct from extant objects the Tyrolese peasant interiors of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; always bearing in mind that these objects were the possessions of sons of the soil; that they were created from materials which lay ready to the hands of the craftsmen, who were themselves the every-day laborers of their own hamlets. And in these objects, as well as in the peasant household fittings of other European countries, as also in the American colonial furniture that belonged to poor people, we see everywhere the excellence of the model, together with perfect honesty of material and solidity of construction; from which we argue once more that sincere art must be developed by the people, for the people, as a reciprocal joy for the maker and the user.

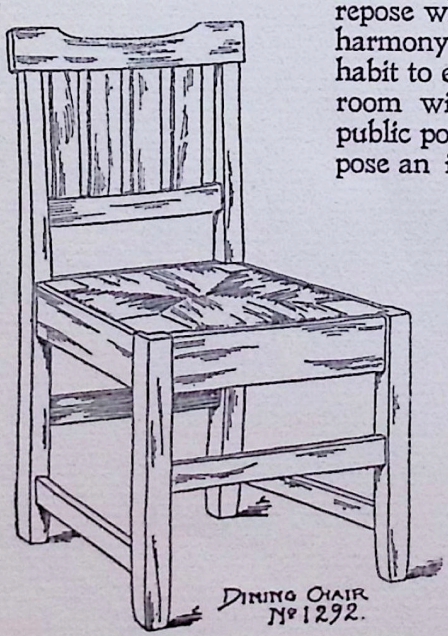
If we pass now from the consideration of the living-room to that of the dining-room, we shall find to be applicable the same principles of fitting and decoration. Here again, no article should be admitted that literally does not earn its living: that is, ren-


ARM CHAIR No 2616
SIDE BOARD No 901
PLATE RACK No 903.
CHAIR No 2606.



der some actual service to the frequenters of the room. Here especially, the tendency to crowd and multiply the furnishings should be avoided, as there is no surer means of destroying the decorative value of the separate pieces, and of defeating their purpose as useful articles. Free space is in itself an ally of the decorator, and, in the dining-room, it becomes a first essential; both for the comfort of the guests and the convenience of the servants, who, if crowded among buffets, china-cabinets, chairs and tables, require the dexterity of a gypsy in the egg-dance to avoid breakage and disaster. Another provision of equal importance is that the size of the room and of its furnishings should be adjusted to each other, as apparent space may be rapidly diminished by the introduction of pieces too large and too massive. It is easy for the rich man to furnish his dining-room in baronial splendor; but it is possible for the man of the middle class to offer hospitality to his friends amid surroundings equally tasteful, although simple and comparatively inexpensive. This he may do by avoiding the eruptive carving, the applied ornament, the unrefined moldings which have hitherto characterized much of the furniture offered as *"stylish pieces"* in the shops.

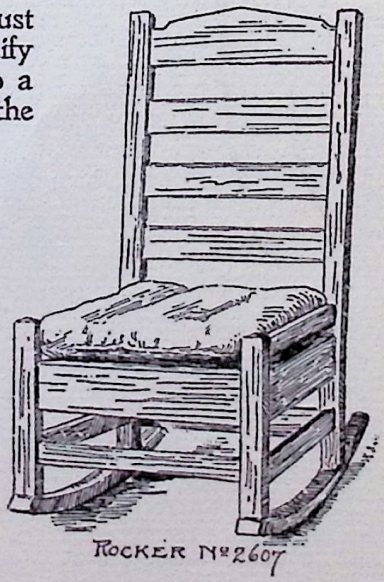
It is unnecessary further to accentuate the principle already suggested, but in passing now to consider the bed-room, a new essential presents itself. In this class of rooms, sanitation is the first law; upon which follow respect for space, regard for utility and comfort, and the quest for that repose which results from suavity of line and harmony of color. It has been a too frequent habit to eke out the furnishings of the bed-room with pieces discarded from the more public portions of the house, and thus to compose an ill-assorted, motley assemblage sug-

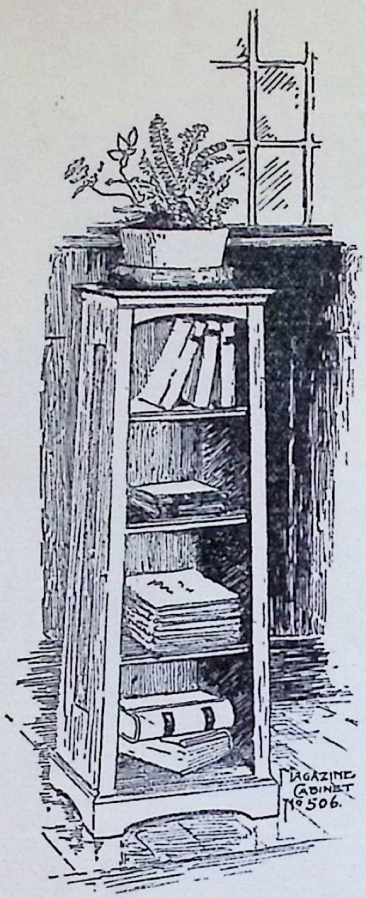


gestive of a Sailor's Snug Harbor, or an Hotel des Invalides: a review anything but cheering to one awakening from sleep, or confined by illness.

The furnisher of the perfect bed-room respects the advice to Phaeton, when he assumed control of the Chariot of the Sun: "Thou shalt go safest in the middle course." He avoids anything suggestive of bareness and coldness. He gives to every thing the air of being fitted to its place and of intending permanently to hold that place. And when his task is finished, the room occupies a position midway between the sleeping-room of the antique world and that meeting-place of the products of many ages and countries which the modern so-called bed-room often becomes under the hand of the decorator. The Greeks and Romans literally took up their beds and walked, from a closet on the north side of their dwellings to another closet on the south side, whenever the winds from the mountains warned them of the approach of winter. From these closets they eliminated all superfluous and many (in our opinion) necessary articles. We may imagine that the Greeks admitted a press for plaiting their gowns and mantles, and a few vases which served them for bureaux, chests of drawers, and boxes; but neither they nor the Romans had the faintest conception of either comfort or home-life.

In sharp contrast to this poverty of furnishings, stands out the luxury of a now frequent type of bed-room which, when we cross its threshold, suggests the quaint expression: "A superfluity of naughtiness." And such indeed it is, with its confusion of objects of ill-defined use, which must require the entire time of one person to classify and regulate; with its space twisted into a labyrinth which, by day, has its perils in the





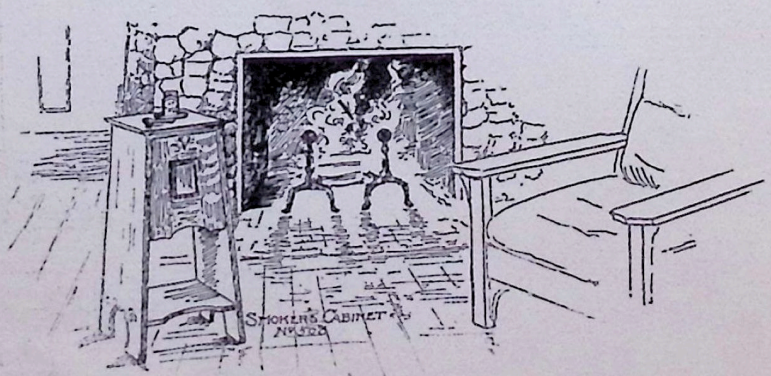
form of threatening bric-a-brac, and through which, by night, Ariadne must perforce guide Theseus.

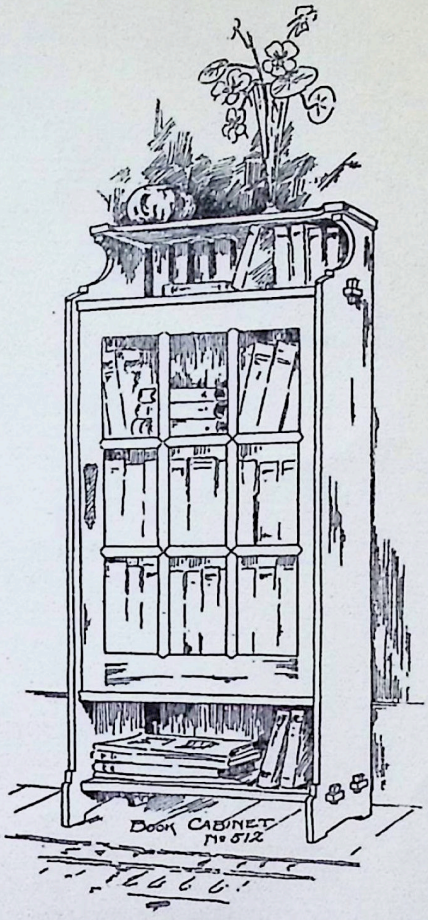
No, the perfect bed-room leans towards neither of these distressing extremes. It contains a sufficiency of good furnishings which charm by their form and color; which offer hospitality and comfort, and which, in so doing, are altogether unobtrusive.

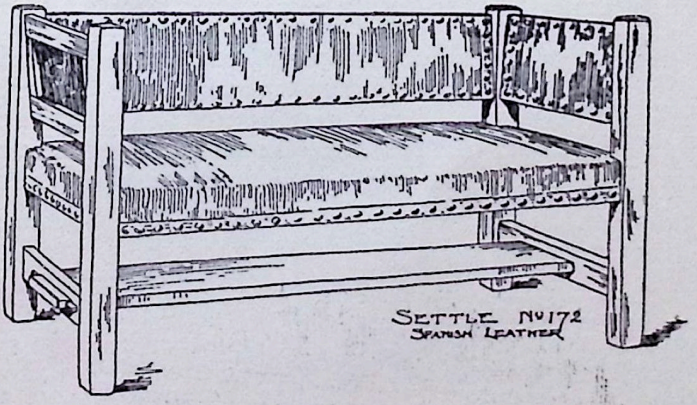
We have now considered the component parts of the dwelling of our day. To add to these is simple multiplication, and no new development; since these rooms and their dependencies provide for all real needs.

To produce, then, a home whose appointments render it a fitting scene for the work, pleasure, rest and refreshment suited to the station and tastes of those who are to inhabit it, is a task that brings its own reward in the comfort and joy that it provides for both the habitual occupants and the occasional visitors. We can not overestimate the value of symmetry in the objects that daily surround us, or the value of good color in the walls, curtains and cushions upon which our eyes necessarily rest, as we think out the problems of existence. For fine color comes to us like food and like joyful news. It is invigorating.

Our object in presenting these considerations is to lend aid to the pronounced art-movement of the present day; to declare ourselves ready to work for the improvement of public taste, as sincerely as did those English art-artisans of the last quarter century, who removed the ugly and the unsightly from middle-class English homes, in order to substitute therefor a new world of form, and a new rainbow of color, bearing the




BOOK CABINET
No 512


SETTLE No 172
SPANISH LEATHER

promise that the old order of things hostile to beauty should never again return.

In the designing and making of objects for daily use, like necessary articles of furniture, opportunities for mechanical and artistic fraud occur, of which the unscrupulous designer and craftsman will take advantage. The one who acquires the object, being of another calling, or profession, is often incompetent to pronounce upon the excellence of the model employed, and the solidity of construction attained. He trusts and is deceived. He is forced often to replace his ugly, out-worn chairs and seats and tables, and he thus becomes the possessor of an incongruous assemblage of pieces whose quarrels with their neighbors never cease,—quarrels which, although mute, are not, for that reason, less distressing to the on-looker.

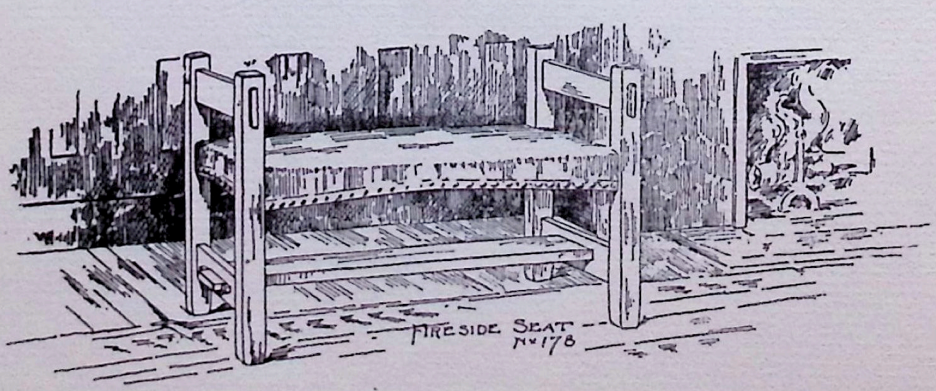
To prevent such cases as these, within the radius of our possibilities, we have pledged ourselves never to produce anything that shall degrade a man to make, or to sell. We have set before ourselves the ideals of honesty of material, solidity of construction, utility, adaptability to place, and aesthetic effect. And it is by our failure, or our success in attaining these ideals that we demand to be judged.

Our especial points of solicitude can be briefly summed up:

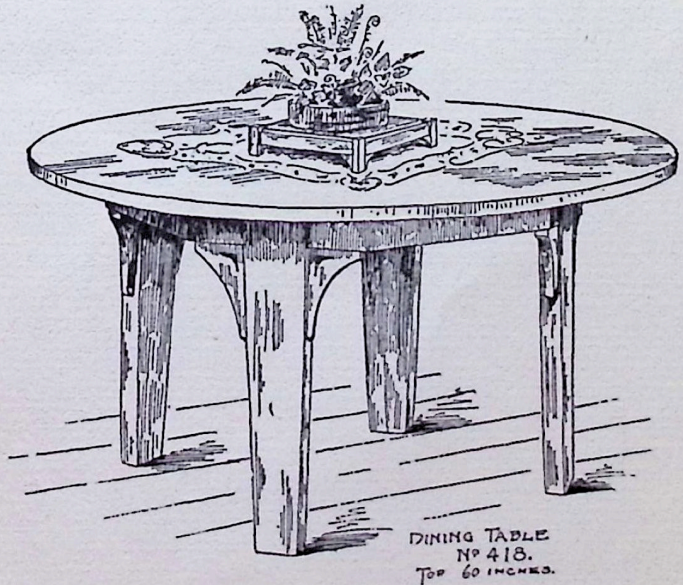
First, the choice and treatment of the material employed;

Second, the care used in construction, whether treated from the point of view of use, or of beauty.

Our materials are selected by experts and are subjected to processes which render them proof against the most trying conditions of climate and of house-temperature. In the treatment of woods, it is our purpose to retain, as far as possible, the



China Cabinet No 902



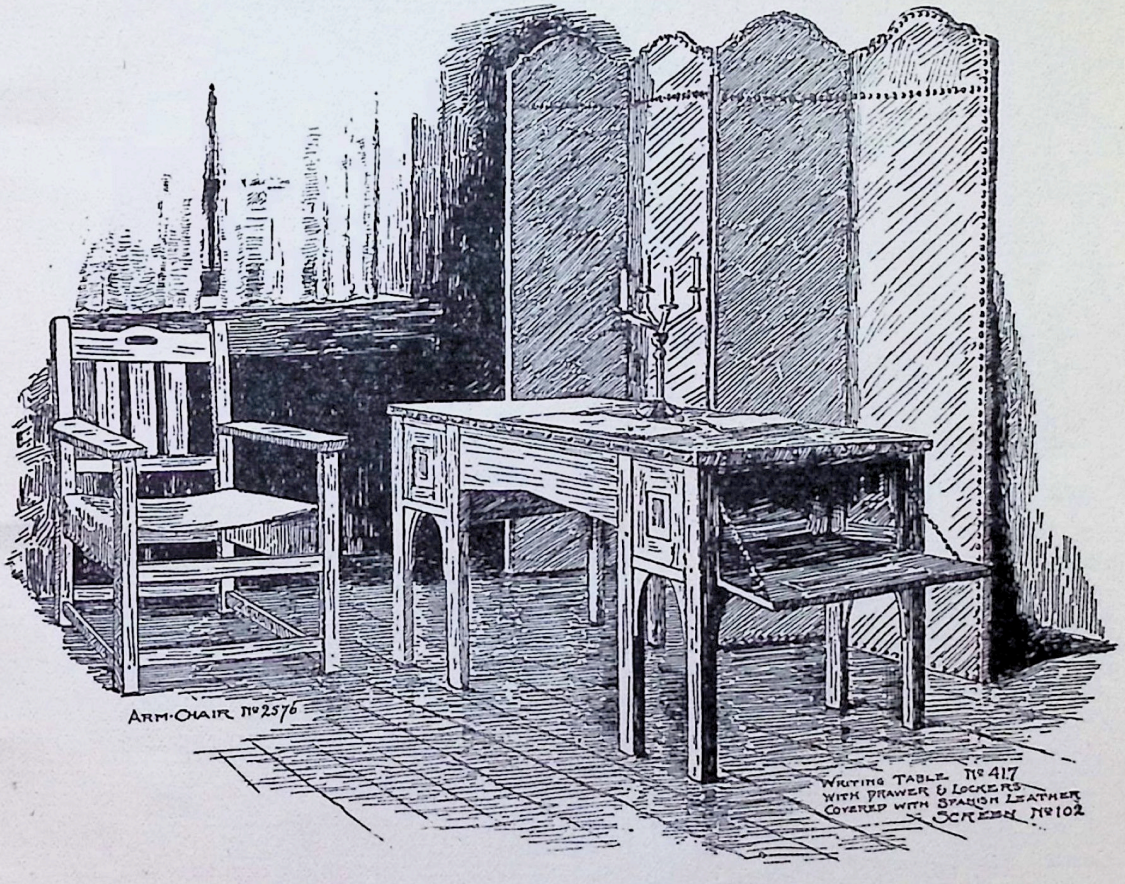
Dining Table
No 418.
Top 60 inches.

natural appearance of the substance; intensifying the look of age, and staining it in tints that long exposure and *"weathering"* might have imparted to it; afterward giving it a soft, dull finish which unifies what otherwise were a too "spotty" surface. As an instance of such treatment, we may mention our specimens of oak, which might well pass for the unaided work of nature and time. This wood, when finished in our workshop, is characterized by a pleasing gray-brown effect, which in some lights, gives out fine notes of green. It is admirably adapted for use with the soft colors of Oriental rugs and hangings.

Our experiments with ash and hazel have proven no less successful, and we also use several more accentuated stains, in gray and green effects, which are distinguished by rare color properties and by peculiar lustre.

As an adjunct to the woods so treated, leather is felt in our workshop, to be of a high artistic value. This material, therefore, is prepared with extreme care for its proper office. As is well known, the Spaniards in the Middle Ages, and at the period of the Renaissance, were the most skilful dressers of hides and skins for decorative purposes, and, so far as is practicable, we follow their methods of preparation. Here again, time acts as the ally of the "Old Masters"; since the beautiful color properties of the "antiques," which we are able successfully to reproduce, could not have been possessed even by the Spanish leathers in their youthful prime. The material having been made to respond to certain desired color-notes, is employed by us with the above-described woods and to an extent that is quite peculiar to our workshop.

Among other aids to our artistic effects in material, we must desig-

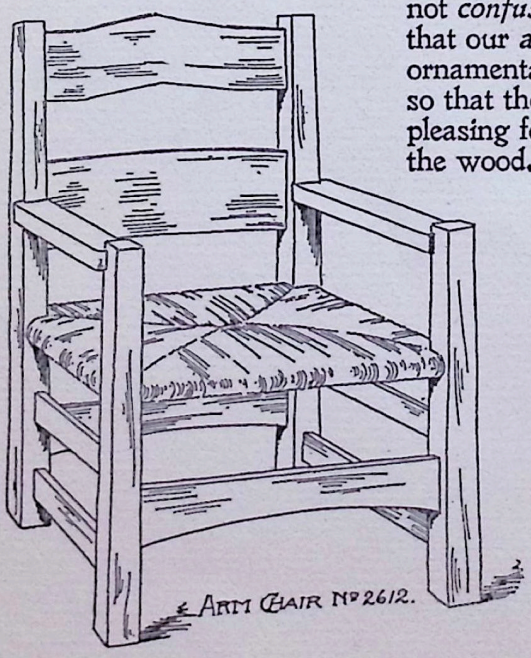

ARM-CHAIR No 2576
WRITING TABLE No 417
WITH DRAWER & LOCKERS
COVERED WITH SPANISH LEATHER
SCREEN No 102

nate the now famous "Grueby Tiles," in rich Veronese greens and blues and vivid orange, which we employ to make spots of positive, intense color upon our negative backgrounds; also, with the more practical purpose of affording cleanly and sanitary surfaces for the tops of wash-stands, plant-stands, and tabourets.

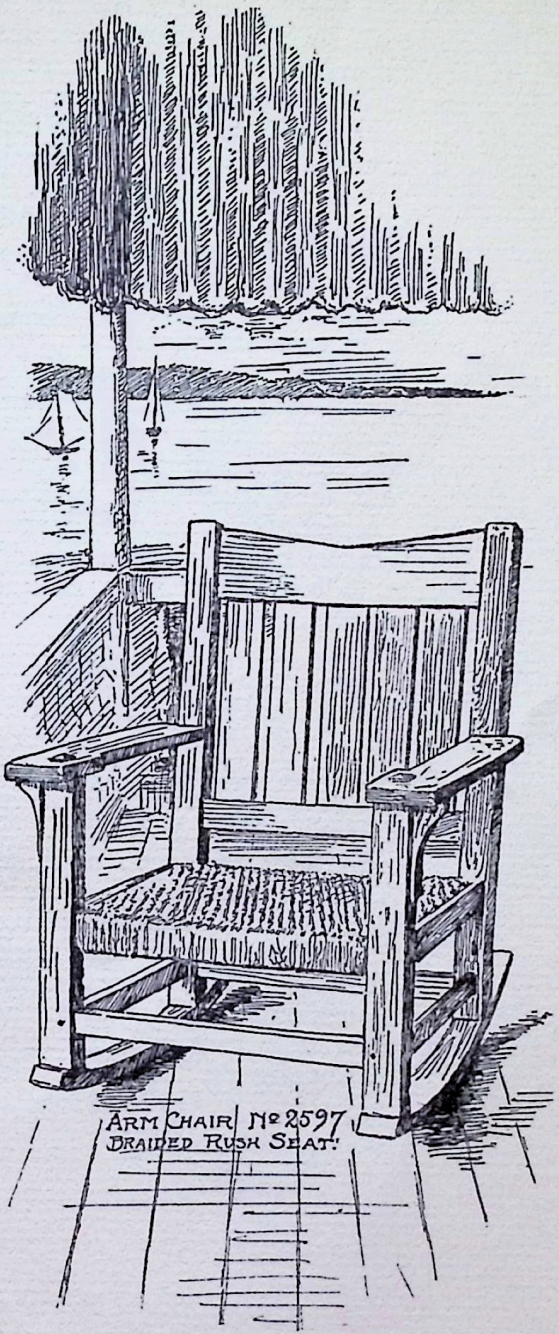
Still another material subject to our experiments, is the rush, or reed, which although commonly and inartistically used, is capable of becoming a significant decorative factor; as we may find by reference to the work of savage tribes, in their utensils and ornament.

Our second point of solicitude: that is, the care used in the construction of our furniture, whether it be treated from the utilitarian, or the aesthetic side, is of still greater interest than the first to those not belonging to the craft. We command the attention of buyers of household fittings, because they are assured of obtaining from us articles which are strongly made from thoroughly seasoned material, and which are easily kept clean, smooth, bright, and in good repair. We also attract lovers and students of art by our distinctive designs, and our deviations from the established treatment of form. The attainment of such designs is the object of our strenuous and constant effort, and our success as artists and craftsmen is largely due to happy, original attempts in this direction.

Our first and leading purpose in building a cabinet, case, bed, or chair, is that the design shall *represent*, and not *confuse* the structural idea; in a word, that our *art* shall not conceal our *article;* all ornamentation being kept as simple as possible, so that the beauty of the piece may lie in its pleasing form, and in the color and finish of the wood. Thus, by the elimination of points



ARM CHAIR No 2612.



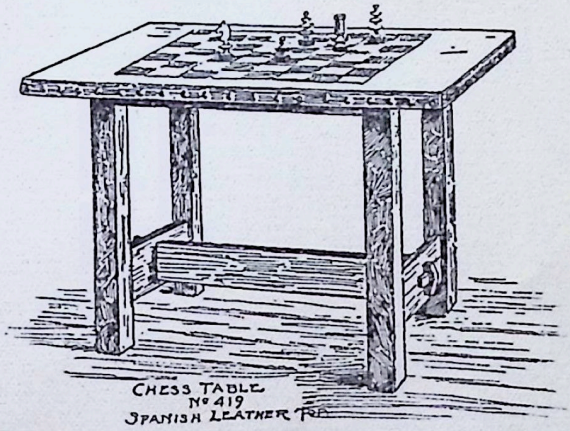
ARM CHAIR No 2597
BRAIDED RUSH SEAT

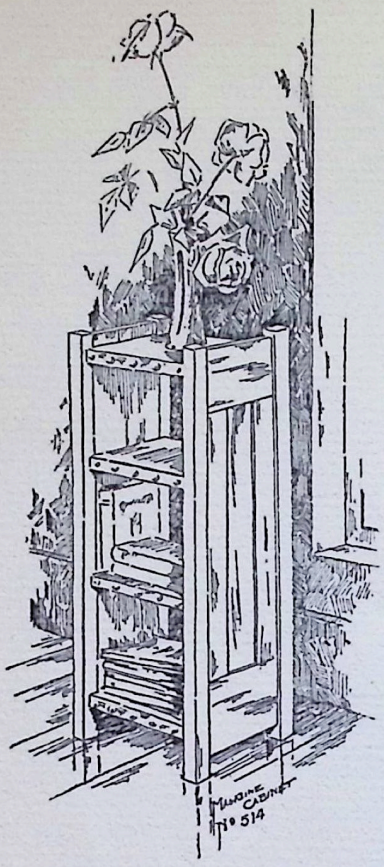
intended for decoration, which do not decorate, which appear to be part of the construction and yet have no part in it, we arrive at the desired end: that is, the perfect correspondence of the piece to its primitive use and intention.

At the same time, we do not make our constructive features unduly prominent; for we never lose the opportunity to incorporate in our work lines of beauty, which will be recognized in the long, refined, graceful curves; in the softening of wedge-effects; in the forms of the mullions entering into the doors of cases and cabinets, in the refinement of moldings and angles, so treated as to create an agreeable play of lights and shadows; in the restrained, although never tame, ornamentation.

Considered purely from the artistic point of view, our models offer an interesting study in the evolution of form. We have, in accordance with what we feel to be the demand of the future, abandoned the historic styles, which weremovements justified and natural in their time, but which correspond to conditions now, to some degree, non-existent.

Occasionally, in some pieces of our work, the student will catch a faint, distant echo of a world-famous ornament, but he will be a Darwin of design who can trace the intervening links between the primitive form and our own presentation of its evolutionized descendant. Such is our use of the lotus, the convolvulus, and other beautiful plant-forms, which, to speak scientifically, we "simplify," and again reconstruct and develop by the process of "natural selection"; attaining thereby a design which does not weary, or annoy, by its meaningless adherence to history and precedent, and which charms by the simplicity of its contours,


CHESS TABLE
No 419
SPANISH LEATHER TOP

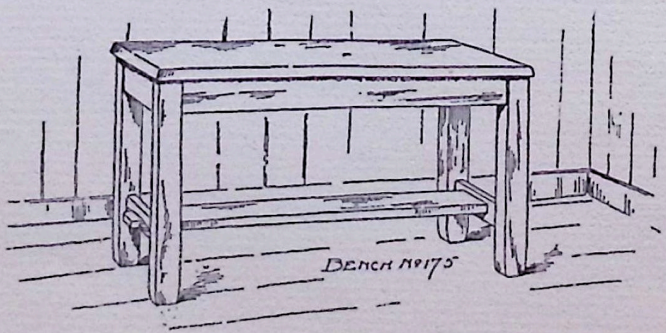


wherein there is nothing to trace out, save lines of extreme subtlety, like those which attract and allure us in the drawing of Leonardo da Vinci.

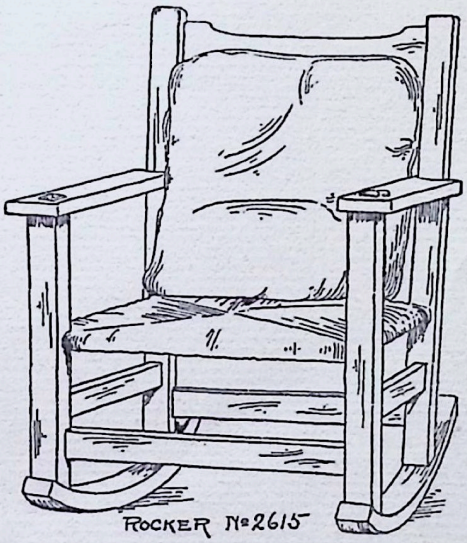
Now and again, also, in our models, there may be found certain resemblances to the household fittings of the peasant, or the Puritan. But such resemblances result from original attempts in the direction of sound construction, rather than from designed and express imitation. Indeed, we may say in concluding the explanation of our designs, that our object is to represent the primitive idea of any given article, but, at the same time, to express that idea with the maximum skill of design and of craftsmanship.

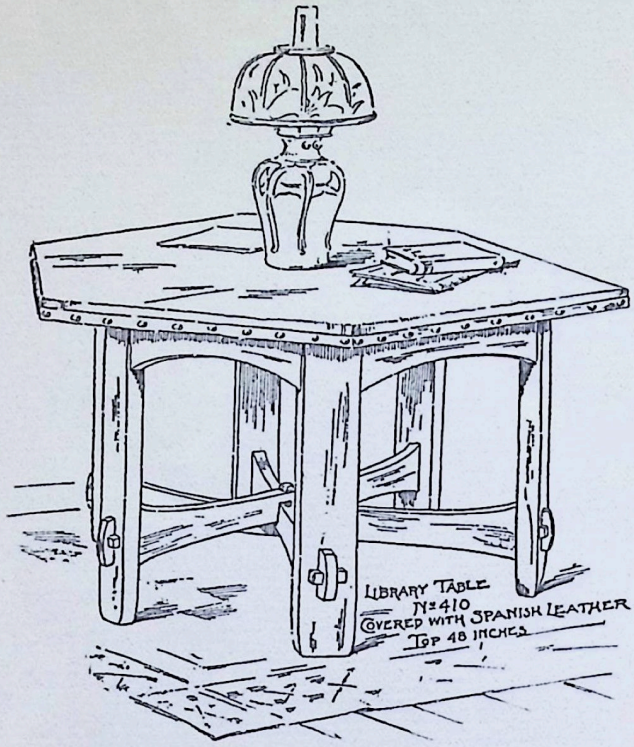
One other appealing characteristic of our productions lies in their provision for convenience and comfort. Our cabinets, cases, and bureaux present a single line of frontage; thus assuring all the space announced by the dimensions of the base; our library and bed-room chairs are made with sloping backs, designed for use with movable pillows which are held in place by means of cross-racks; they are also given broad arms, through which the front posts are often mortised. Furthermore, certain models are sometimes employed, which, by their roominess and peculiar construction, partake of the nature of bed, table and chair; providing an excellent resting place, and, at the same time, offering conveniences for holding the books, or the work of the occupant.

In thus providing comfort or convenience, assuring utility, and securing thorough construction, harmony of line and refinement of color, in every object that leaves our workshop, we feel that we fulfil our duty as artists and craftsmen; that we are working for a definite and high purpose: that is, the improvement of the public

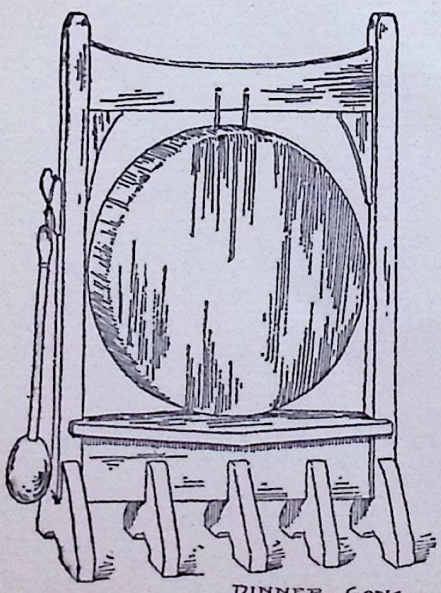


taste; that we are putting forth our personal efforts to realize the meaning of an art developed by the people, for the people, as a reciprocal joy for the maker and the user.

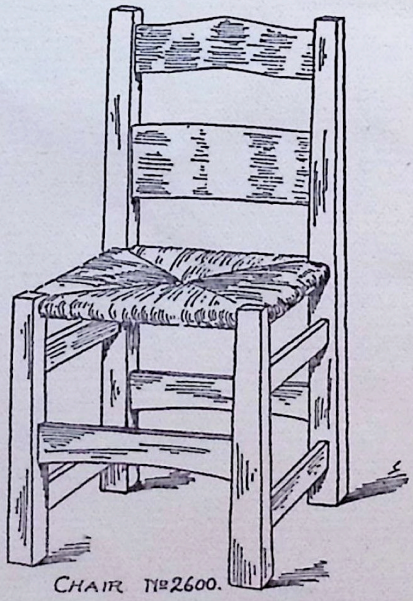




LIBRARY TABLE
№410
COVERED WITH SPANISH LEATHER
TOP 48 INCHES

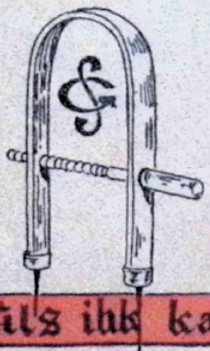


DINNER GONG.



CHAIR №2600.

LYMAN BROS., PRINTERS
SYRACUSE, N. Y.



Gustave Stickley
Cabinet Maker
Syracuse
N.Y